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MINISTRY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY



MK Yadav Sir

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THE HINDU

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DIGILOCKER PLATFORM

(Syllabus: GS Paper 2 – Govt Policies/Schemes)

What is DigiLocker and does it keep your data and documents safe?

The DigiLocker platform, launched in 2015, operates as an app to store users' digital records. As of early May, the app has over 270 million registered users, while nearly 6.7 billion documents have been retrieved through it

Sahana Venugopal

The story so far:

As thousands of students across the country rush to their computers to check their board exam results, many of them now have the option of viewing their scores and even obtaining their verified marksheets through the Indian government's DigiLocker platform. While 10th and 12th standard students from the CISCE board as well as 10th standard students from the State Board of Tamil Nadu can get their 2024 results from DigiLocker, this facility is coming soon to the students of the CBSE board.

What is DigiLocker and who uses it?

The DigiLocker platform, launched in 2015, operates as an app to store users' digital records. The app can be used when applying for a passport, reviewing marksheets, or proving one's identity during travel. The app is part of the Indian government's paper-free initiative aimed at letting users access, verify, and store essential documents in a digital wallet so that they are easy to retrieve and present to officials when required. As of early May, the app has over 270 million registered users, while nearly 6.7 billion documents – like Aadhaar, insurance policy papers, PAN records, and driving licences – have been retrieved through it.

As per DigiLocker's website: "The issued documents in DigiLocker system are deemed to be at par with original physical documents as per Rule 9A of the Information Technology (Preservation and Retention of Information by Intermediaries providing Digital Locker facilities) Rules, 2016 notified on February 8, 2017 vide G.S.R. 711(E)."

Why are users adopting DigiLocker?

DigiLocker is a paperless solution meant to ensure that a user can access the latest and updated versions of their documents online in order to prove their identity and their credentials at any given moment. To the verifying officials, this helps in keeping at bay fake, poor quality print copies, and outdated documents that miss key details.

Also, for the user, this app helps eliminate the need to carry separate sets of documents while they are on the move. Instead, the documents can be fetched or stored in a local device. In theory, these digital documents are no less valid than their originals. Additionally, the DigiLocker website noted that using the app can help with faster service delivery.

How secure is DigiLocker?

DigiLocker is a flagship initiative of the Ministry of Electronics & IT (MeitY) under the Digital India programme, meaning it is a government approved application and is ideally maintained with strict security protocols framed by officials. As per the MEITY website: "DigiLocker ties into Digital India's vision areas of providing citizens a secure document access platform on a public cloud."

According to DigiLocker's own website, it has standard security measures in place including 2048 Bit RSA SSL encryption, multi-factor authentication (OTP verification), consent systems, timed log outs, and security audits. However, any government database that stores citizens' information and documents is inevitably an attractive target for hackers who steal user data and sell it on the dark web.

On June 2, 2020, DigiLocker posted a notice about a "potential vulnerability in the sign-up flow," that could have led to accounts being compromised. However, due to a CERT-In alert and another independent researcher, DigiLocker said that the vulnerability was patched within a day of getting the alert, and that user data was safe. As per Google Play Store, no DigiLocker data is shared with third parties and data is encrypted in transit. Examples of data collected include files and documents (optional), your name, email (optional), and user IDs.

What are some issues with DigiLocker?

People who are not used to smartphones or those find it difficult to navigate apps may struggle to download DigiLocker, use OTPs, and fetch their credentials unless they have assistance. Those who cannot read are also at a disadvantage.

Another hurdle is that people with multiple names, aliases, inconsistent spellings, or even slightly mismatched certificates may not be able to smoothly fetch their documents via DigiLocker as the app needs the submitted details to match the issuer's data exactly. Users have in the past complained that even subtle changes such as capitalised letters and initials can lead to failure.

Furthermore, there is no uniformity in how different government authorities and law enforcement bodies in India review official documents. While some insist on being shown virtual documents through DigiLocker, others claim the original hard copies are mandatory.

Do I need DigiLocker in order to get a new passport?

The Hindu reached out to Passport Seva in order to learn whether DigiLocker is a must for passport processing. An official responder from the National Call Centre said that only the original hard copy of the documents and xerox copies were required, and that the DigiLocker was not mandatory. By contrast, officials have in the past urged passport applicants to use the DigiLocker app in order to speed up the application process. There have also been instances where passport office authorities insisted on seeing documents through the DigiLocker app, in addition to inspecting the originals in paper form. Since the implementation of this policy varies wildly across the country, those who wish to complete administrative processes without hassle can come prepared with their original documents, physical copies of the same, and the needed documents/credentials on DigiLocker as well.

Significance of Digilocker

- It has standard security measures in place including 2048 Bit RSA SSL encryption, multi-factor authentication (OTP verification), consent systems, timed log outs, and security audits.
- However, any government database that stores citizens' information and documents is inevitably an attractive target for hackers who steal user data and sell it on the dark web.

Context: Recently, as students nationwide hurried to their computers for board exam results, many can now access and even obtain their verified marksheets through the Indian government's DigiLocker platform.

Digilocker Platform

- **About**: It was initiated in 2015, serves as an application for securely storing users' digital documents.
- **Nodal Agency**: Ministry of Electronics & IT (MeitY)
- **Part of**: Digital India programme.
- **Applications**: It facilitates various tasks such as passport applications, academic records review, and identity verification during travel.
- **Government's Initiative:** DigiLocker aligns with the Indian government's digital initiative to minimize paper usage and promote accessibility to essential documents.
- **User Base and Document Retrieval**: As of early May, the platform boasts over 270 million registered users and has facilitated the retrieval of nearly 6.7 billion documents.
- **Purpose and Significance**: DigiLocker serves as a paperless solution, ensuring users have access to updated documents, aiding in identity verification and credential authentication.
- **Combating Fraud and Inaccuracy:** By providing digitally verified documents, DigiLocker helps officials in verifying identities and credentials accurately, minimizing the risk of fraudulent or outdated documentation.

INDIAN EXPRESS Page 10

OLEANDER

(Syllabus GS Paper 3 – Env and Eco)

WHY KERALA TEMPLES BANNED USE OF OLEANDER FLOWERS AS OFFERINGS

SHAJU PHILIP
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, MAY 12

TWO KERALA government-controlled temple boards, which together manage 2,500-odd temples in the state, have banned the use of oleander flowers (locally known as *arali*) in temple offerings after a 24-year-old woman died after accidentally chewing some oleander leaves.

Here is what to know about oleander, its medicinal uses, and its toxicity.

First, what happened?

Surya Surendran, a 24-year-old nurse, died on April 30, *prima facie* due to accidental oleander poisoning.

Surendran had got a new job in the United Kingdom, and was set to leave on April 28. That morning, however, she chewed some leaves of an oleander shrub that grew outside her home in Pallipad, Alappuzha. She was on the phone, possibly absent-minded, and probably did not know or understand the danger from the plant.

She soon developed uneasiness, and vomited a few times. She went to Kochi airport, but collapsed there. She was taken to hospital, where she died a couple of days later.

Asked what she had eaten, she told doctors that she had chewed oleander leaves and flowers. The forensic surgeon, who conducted the autopsy, told police that she had suffered oleander poisoning.

What is oleander?

Nerium oleander, commonly known as oleander or rosebay, is a shrub or small tree that grows in tropical, subtropical, and temperate regions around the world, and is known for its drought tolerance. It has flowers of various colours including red, pink, and white, and is often used for ornamental and landscaping purposes.

In Kerala, the plant is known by the names *arali* and *kanaveeram*, and is grown along highways and beaches as a natural, green fencing.

Where is oleander used?

The *Ayurvedic Pharmacopoeia of India* (API), a government document that describes the quality, purity, and strength of drugs used in Ayurveda, mentions oleander. According to API, an oil prepared from the root bark can be used to treat skin diseases.

The plant has been "frequently described in Brihattrayi, Nighantus and other classical Ayurvedic texts. Charaka (*Charak Samhita*) has prescribed the leaves of white flowered variety externally in chronic and obstinate skin diseases of serious nature including leprosy,"



Toxicity of oleander has been known since antiquity. *Wikimedia Commons*

Anamika Chaudhari and Bhawna Singh from the Himalayee Ayurvedic Medical College and Hospital, Dehradun, wrote in a research paper titled 'A Critical Review of Karvira', published in 2016 in the *International Journal of Ayurveda & Medical Sciences*.

"Bhavaprakasha has described *Karvira* (another name of the plant) as a *visha* (poison) and indicated it in treatment of *vrana* (infected wounds), *kustha* (skin diseases including leprosy), *krimi* (microbes and parasites), *kandu* (itching), etc," they wrote.

How toxic is oleander?

Even though it is prescribed in some ayurvedic formulations, the toxicity of oleander has been long recognised in cultures around the world. Researchers Shannon D Langford and Paul J Boor wrote the plant has been "exploited therapeutically and as an instrument of suicide since antiquity". ('Oleander toxicity: an examination of human and animal exposures' published in the journal *Toxicology* in 1995). Inhalation of smoke from burning oleander can be intoxicating.

The toxicity of oleander is due to the properties of cardiac glycosides such as oleandrin, folinerin, and digitoxigenin, which are present in all parts of the plant.

"Cardiac glycosides are steroidal compounds capable of exerting pharmacological effects on cardiac muscle. The primary therapeutic value of these glycosides lies in their ability to exert profound tonic effects on the heart (stronger and faster heart contractions)," Langford and Boor wrote.

"However, the therapeutic window is small and overdose/ toxicity is frequently encountered when using these drugs," they added.

Effects of oleander toxicity include nausea, diarrhoea, vomiting, rashes, confusion, dizziness, irregular heartbeats, slow heartbeats, and, in extreme cases, death. According to the website of New York's Mount Sinai hospital, "Symptoms last for 1 to 3 days and may require a hospital stay. Death is unlikely."

Context: Recently, two Kerala government-controlled temple boards prohibited the use of **oleander flowers (locally known as arali)** in temple offerings following the death of a 24-year-old woman who accidentally consumed oleander leaves.

Oleander

- **About:** Oleander, scientifically known as Nerium oleander, is a widely cultivated plant found across tropical, subtropical, and temperate regions.
- **Common Names**: It goes by the common names of oleander or rosebay, reflecting its widespread recognition.
- **Ornamental Value:** Known for its resilience to drought, it's frequently utilized in landscaping and ornamental gardening.
- **Oleander Used in Traditional Medicine**
  - **Ayurvedic Recognition**: The Ayurvedic Pharmacopoeia of India (API) acknowledges oleander, particularly its root bark, as medicinal.
  - **Therapeutic Usage**: API suggests that an oil derived from the root bark can be effective in treating various skin ailments.
  - **Historical Significance**: Oleander finds mention in classical Ayurvedic texts, including Brihattrayi and Nighantus, indicating its historical therapeutic usage.
- **Toxicity Concerns**: Despite its medicinal properties, oleander's toxicity has been recognized historically, with documented cases of both therapeutic use and self-harm.

THE HINDU

P 12/May 12

PHARMA SECTOR IN INDIA

(Syllabus: GS Paper 3 – Sci and Tech)

How is India streamlining the pharma sector?

Why has the drug regulator tweaked norms for exports? Where does India stand as a drugs manufacturer? Does the change follow allegations of sub-standard medicines being exported? Will a centralising authority help, with several important drugs set to go off the patent list?

Bindu Shajan Perappadan

The story so far:

India's drug regulator, the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO), has withdrawn powers delegated to State licensing authorities to issue NOCs (no objection certificates) for manufacture of unapproved, banned or new drugs for export purposes. This latest announcement covering drugs for export comes at a time when India has been under scrutiny for allegations of supplying substandard drugs causing health concerns in several countries. The CDSCO is now the sole authority for issuing manufacturing licences for drugs meant for export.

What is India's role in the pharma market?

India ranks third worldwide as a producer of drugs and pharmaceuticals by volume, exporting to around 200 countries/territories. The Indian pharmaceutical industry supplies 62% of the global demand for vaccines and is a leading supplier of DPT (diphtheria, pertussis and tetanus), BCG (Bacillus Calmette-Guérin, used primarily against tuberculosis), and measles vaccines. At least 70% of WHO's vaccines (as per the essential immunisation schedule) are sourced from India, the Centre

Local regulators will have to hand over details of all approvals given from August 2018 to May 2024 to the central drug regulator

had noted in a submission in Parliament.

What will be the impact?

India is a key player in the international generic medicine market and any change in policy has a direct impact on manufacturers and importers, say industry insiders. The centralising of the licensing authority is significant, they point out, because according to a study conducted by the Department of Pharmaceuticals, India needs to get ready to take advantage of drug sales worth $251 billion going off-patent this coming decade.

The study notes: "In the years between 2022 and 2030, the pharmaceutical sector in India will undergo landmark changes as several drugs are expected to go off-patent and provide an opportunity for the entry of generic products. Expiry of patents is very promising for the Indian generic drug market as it is expected to expand and grow further with inclusion of these new drugs. With ongoing developments, India has started focusing on self-reliance at a large scale. Hence, it is imperative to identify these drugs beforehand, draft and implement strategies which help in their timely entry into the market by promoting generic drug manufacturing."

What are the challenges?

India is dealing with several challenges, including tackling intellectual property rights, lack of research and development etc. The study points out that understanding the political, economic, sociocultural, technological, environmental, and legal factors is vital for assessing the opportunities and challenges in the pharmaceutical market in India. "The industry must adapt to changes in these external factors, navigate regulatory requirements, leverage technology advancements, and align their strategies with the evolving needs of the pharmaceutical industry to succeed in the global market," it noted. Speaking about the change, Raheel Shah, business development director, BDR Pharmaceuticals, says the move is welcome as the centralisation of NOCs will formalise the Indian pharma industry. "This will result in the efficiency of the overall process along with bolstering pharma exports to key international markets. It will help to bring uniformity in protocols, achieve the target of reaching $450 billion by 2047," he adds.

What about the quality of manufacturing?

An article in the *British Medical Journal* titled, 'Indian government cracks down on 18 drug companies for poor quality manufacturing', noted that the Indian government had cancelled the licences of over 10 pharmaceutical companies as part of a crackdown on poor quality manufacturing. The action last March came after an inspection of 76 drug firms across 20 States. "The government is also understood to have given notices to a further 26 companies for not complying with good manufacturing processes. The Indian pharmaceutical industry has an estimated 10,500 companies, with drug exports having more than doubled in the past decade. But the industry has faced a series of scandals of late, including a World Health Organization investigation into four contaminated cough syrups that caused acute kidney injuries and were linked to the deaths of 66 children in the Republic of the Gambia last year," it added.

In what seems like an effort to keep a strict watch, the latest order by CDSCO states that pharmaceutical companies will have to get their NOCs from the zonal offices of CDSCO online before applying for manufacturing licences from their respective State/UT drug regulators. The Drugs Controller General of India, Rajeev Singh Raghuvanshi, said the decision was taken to facilitate the application process. In 2018, the CDSCO had permitted State and UTs' drug licensing authorities to grant permissions to export some specific drugs. As per the new order, local regulators will have to hand over the details of all the approvals they have given from August 2018 to May 2024 to CDSCO.

The centralisation of powers hasn't come as an overnight development, says an industry expert. The Central government's advisory group on drugs had earlier this year noted that getting NOCs from local drug regulators for pharmaceutical products is a tedious process, leading to delays. Says Harish K. Jain, president, Federation of Pharma Entrepreneurs: "We don't anticipate any major impact as far as costing or delays with this latest move. Export of goods is on the Union List. Also, the central authority was always the Central government; the power to hand out licences for export of drugs was delegated to States a few years ago."



GETTY IMAGES

Context: India's drug regulator, the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO), has withdrawn powers delegated to State licensing authorities to issue NOCs (no objection certificates) for manufacture of unapproved, banned or new drugs for export purposes.

Pharma Sector in India

- **Global Ranking**: India ranks third worldwide as a producer of drugs and pharmaceuticals by volume, a testament to its significant role in the global pharmaceutical market.
- **Dominance in Vaccine Supply**: Supplying 62% of the global demand for vaccines, India stands as a crucial player in global vaccination efforts, underscoring its pivotal role in public health.
- **Vaccine Suppliers**: India emerges as a leading supplier of key vaccines such as DPT (diphtheria, pertussis, and tetanus), BCG (Bacillus Calmette-Guérin), and measles vaccines, contributing significantly to global immunization programs.
- **WHO Vaccine Sourcing**: At least 70% of the World Health Organization's vaccines, as per the essential immunization schedule, are sourced from India, highlighting the country's indispensable contribution to global healthcare initiatives.
- **Dominance in Generic Medicines**: The country is the largest provider of generic medicines worldwide, commanding a **20% share in global supply by volume.**
- **Global Export Hub:** India exports pharmaceuticals to over 200 countries worldwide. It meets over **50% of Africa's requirement for generics**, nearly 40% of the generic demand in the US, and approximately 25% of all medicine needs in the UK.

Impact on India's Position in the Generic Medicine Market

- **Status**: India's pivotal role in the international generic medicine market implies that any policy change directly affects manufacturers and importers.
- **Licensing Authority**: Industry insiders highlight the significance of centralizing the licensing authority. This move aims to streamline regulatory processes and ensure efficient market entry for generic drugs.
- **Landmark Changes Expected**: The sector anticipates landmark changes as numerous drugs go off-patent, paving the way for the entry of generic products into the market.

PIB May 12

ASEAN-INDIA FTA
(Syllabus: GS Paper 2 – IR)

4th Meeting of ASEAN-India Trade in Goods Agreement Joint Committee

Context: The 4th Joint Committee recently convened in Putrajaya, Malaysia to review the ASEAN-India Trade in Goods Agreement (AITIGA).

ASEAN-India Trade in Goods Agreement (AITIGA)

- **About**: India and ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) have a **Free Trade Agreement (FTA)** known as the ASEAN-India Trade in Goods Agreement (AITIGA).
- **Background:** The ASEAN-India Trade in Goods Agreement (AITIGA) was signed in 2009 and came into effect in 2010.
- **Objective:** The primary aim of the agreement is to enhance trade and economic cooperation between India and the ASEAN member states.
- **Scope:** The agreement covers various aspects related to trade in goods, including tariffs, rules of origin, standards, technical regulations, and conformity assessment procedures.
- **Formation of Sub-committees**: Eight Sub-committees have been constituted under the AITIGA Joint Committee.
    - These sub-committees focus on different policy areas related to the Agreement.
- **3rd Joint Committee meeting**: Delhi, India
- **5th Joint Committee meeting**: Jakarta, Indonesia.

ASEAN

- **Established**: In 1967, by the Bangkok Declaration.
- **Members:** Indonesia, Singapore, Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei, Thailand, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Vietnam.
- **Objective**: It promotes inter-governmental cooperation and facilitates economic, political, security, military, educational, and socio-cultural integration between its members and countries in the Asia-Pacific.
- **Major Partner**: ASEAN is one of the major trade partners of India with a share of 11% in India's global trade. The bilateral trade stood at USD 122.67 Bn during 2023-24.
- **ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA)**: It means the ASEAN-India Free Trade Area under the Framework Agreement on Comprehensive Economic Cooperation between the Republic of India and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

DTE May 12

UN FORUM ON FORESTS

(Syllabus: GS Paper 3 – Env and Eco)

UNFF: Countries adopt declaration on forest protection, emphasise on adopting technology for monitoring

Context: Delegates at the 19th United Nations Forum for Forests (UNFF) recently deliberated on a draft underscoring the vital role of forests in combatting climate change, biodiversity loss, and land degradation.

UN Forum on Forests

- **About:** It advocates for the management, conservation, and sustainable development of various forest ecosystems worldwide.
- **Establishment:** 2000 by the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).
- **Headquarters**: New York
- **Annual High-Level Dialogue:** The Forum convenes annually at the UN Headquarters in New York, gathering representatives from all member states and forest-related agencies.
    - It conducts high-level dialogue on technical matters in odd years and policy matters in even years.
- **Objective:** UNFF serves as a key platform within the UN system for addressing forest-related issues.
- **Membership**: Member States of the United Nations and specialized agencies, fostering global collaboration and cooperation in forest management.
- **India's Role**: India holds a significant position in the UNFF as a founding member.

Recommendation of India

- **Forest Conservation:** India has achieved significant advancements in forest conservation and sustainable forest management over the past fifteen years.
    - These efforts have led to a consistent increase in forest cover across the country.
- **Milestones of Projects**: The recent celebrations marking 50 years of Project Tiger and 30 years of Project Elephant highlight India's commitment to species conservation and habitat protection.
- **International Big Cat Alliance**: India emphasized the creation of the IBCA, aimed at protecting and conserving the seven big cat species worldwide through collaborative international efforts.
- **Green Credit Program:** India introduced the 'Green Credit Program', incentivizing entities to engage in tree plantation and restoration of degraded forest lands, thereby strengthening climate action initiatives.

THE HINDU P 13/May 12

SINAI PENINSULA

(Syllabus: GS Paper 2 – IR)

Opening the gates of hell

Rafah

Despite international warnings and pleas, Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli Prime Minister, seems determined to invade the southern Gaza city where 1.5 million Palestinians, most of them refugees, are living in filthy overcrowded shelters, streets and beaches

Stanly Johny

The pre-war population of Rafah, the southernmost city of the Gaza strip sharing a border with Egypt's Sinai Peninsula, was 1,70,000. Today, seven months after Israel launched its war on Gaza, following Hamas's October 7, 2023 crossborder attack in which at least 1,200 people were killed, as many as 1.5 million people are living in Rafah. Many of them are camping on the streets and beaches, while others are packed into filthy, overcrowded makeshift shelters. Rafah is now a "gigantic refugee camp", Jan Egeland, Secretary-General of the Norwegian Refugee Council, said in February. According to a doctor who served in Rafah, the city is a "closed jail" with faecal matter running through streets so crowded that there is barely space for medics' vehicles to pass, Reuters reported. Medics are struggling to supply even basic aid and prevent the outbreak and spread of diseases. According to Action Aid, every single person in Gaza, a majority of whose population is now jammed in Rafah, "is hungry and people have just 1.5 to 2 litres of unsafe water per day to meet all their needs".

Israel wants to launch a full-scale invasion on this Rafah.

Rafah has always been a flashpoint in the Israel-Palestine conflict, given its territorial proximity to Egypt. After the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, triggered by the declaration of the state of Israel in historical Palestine, Rafah came under Egyptian rule along with other parts of the Gaza Strip. Tens of thousands of Palestinians, who were displaced from their homes when the Jewish state was created, were settled in Gaza. During the Suez Crisis, Rafah came under attack when the Israeli troops were marching towards Sinai through Gaza. On November 12, 1956, the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) raided a refugee camp in Rafah, killing at least 111 Palestinians, which came to be known as the 'Rafah massacre'.

After the Six-Day War of 1967, the entire Gaza, including Rafah, came under Israel's direct military occupation. Israel would retain its direct control over the enclave until 2005. After the latest war began on October 7, Israel ordered over 1 million Palestinians living in northern Gaza to evacuate. Most of them fled their homes and moved to southern cities such as Khan Younis and Rafah. When Khan Younis was attacked, there was another exodus of refugees towards the south. Today, the lion's share of Rafah's population are internally displaced Palestinians.



PHOTO CREDIT: AP

The U.S.clearly warned Israel against launching a full-scale invasion of Rafah, arguing that such an attack would kill more Palestinian civilians. AP

War and talks

The past week saw dramatic developments in the Gaza war. The U.S.clearly warned Israel against launching a full-scale invasion of Rafah, arguing that such an attack would kill more Palestinian civilians. But Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has vowed that Israel would go ahead with the plan to invade Rafah, defying international pressure, warnings and pleas. But Mr. Netanyahu is also under pressure to bring the remaining hostages back.

Israel says 128 hostages abducted on October 7 are still in Hamas captivity, though many of them are feared dead. There are growing protests in Israel, asking the government to strike deal with Hamas to bring the hostages back. Israel and Hamas, helped by mediators such as the U.S., Egypt and Qatar have held multiple rounds of talks in Cairo for a ceasefire deal.

While the finer details of the ceasefire proposal are yet to be made public, reports in Egyptian and Saudi media suggest that the mediators have proposed a three-phase deal that would see the release of all hostages and Palestinian prisoners and eventually bring the war to an end. In the first phase, Israel is expected to cease fire for 40 days and free Palestinian prisoners in return for the release of 33 hostages. In the second phase, the ceasefire would be extended by 42 more days, while all the remaining living hostages would be released. The third phase of the proposals are the most contentious, according to Arab media. Israel wants Hamas to release the bodies of all hostages and Hamas wants a comprehensive, lasting ceasefire and full IDF withdrawal from Gaza.

Israel says no to both Hamas demands. IDF troops have been deployed in northern and central Gaza, effectively carving the northern tip of the strip as a buffer zone between Israel proper and Gaza's population (who have been pushed to the south). If Israeli troops withdraw from Gaza, Israeli officials say, Palestinians as well as Hamas militants would return to areas close to the border. And if Israel agrees to a lasting ceasefire, the remaining Hamas battalions (Israeli officials say four Hamas brigades are present in Rafah) would survive.

When Israel launched the war on October 7, it made its twin objectives public: dismantle Hamas and release the hostages. Seven months after the war, in which roughly 35,000 Palestinians have been killed, Israel has not met either of the objectives. One practical solution to the hostage crisis is to strike a deal with Hamas. But Hamas would release the hostages only in return for a ceasefire. And if Mr. Netanyahu agrees to a ceasefire, Hamas would survive. This is the dilemma the Israel faces.

Earlier, Biden administration officials had said Hamas was the major stumbling block for a ceasefire. Secretary of State Antony Blinken stated on May 4 that "the only thing standing between the people of Gaza and a ceasefire is Hamas". Two days later, however, Hamas's Doha-based leader Ismail Haniyeh said the group had accepted the ceasefire proposal suggested by the mediators in Cairo.

The Hamas announcement came hours after the IDF ordered at least 1,00,000 people to evacuate from Rafah. Mr. Netanyahu's government immediately rejected the Hamas offer, saying it did not meet Israel's core demands. He later said Israel would never agree to end the war in Gaza as part of a deal with Hamas. In other words, the Israelis seemed determined to go ahead with the Rafah attack plan.

Tensions with U.S.

Mr. Netanyahu's tough line on Rafah has created tensions in Israel's ties with the U.S. Earlier, President Biden had said a full-scale attack on Rafah without a proper plan to protect civilians would be a redline for him. Last week, he announced that the U.S. would not supply offensive weapons to Israel if it goes ahead with the attack plan. The United Nations has repeatedly warned that any attack on the overcrowded Rafah would lead to a "humanitarian catastrophe".

If Mr. Netanyahu abandons the plan to attack Rafah and cuts a deal with Hamas for hostages, his government could fall as his far-right allies such as Itamar Ben-Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich have already warned against such a move. If he goes ahead with the plan, more Palestinian civilians would be killed, Israel would further be isolated globally and tensions would rise with the U.S. But Mr. Netanyahu does not seem to bother. "If Israel has to stand alone, it will stand alone," he said on May 10, less than a month after American, British, French and Jordanian defence systems, along with the IDF, shot down most of the drones and cruise and ballistic missiles launched by Iran towards Israel.

THE GIST

After the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, triggered by the declaration of the state of Israel in the historical Palestine, Rafah came under Egyptian rule along with other parts of the Gaza Strip

During the Suez Crisis, Rafah was attacked when the Israeli troops were marching towards Sinai through Gaza. On November 12, 1956, the IDF raided a refugee camp in Rafah, killing at least 111 Palestinians.

After the Six Day War of 1967, the entire Gaza, including Rafah, came under Israel's direct military occupation. Israel would retain its direct control over the enclave until 2005



Context: The pre-war population of Rafah, the southernmost city of the Gaza strip sharing a border with Egypt's Sinai Peninsula, was 1,70,000.

Sinai Peninsula

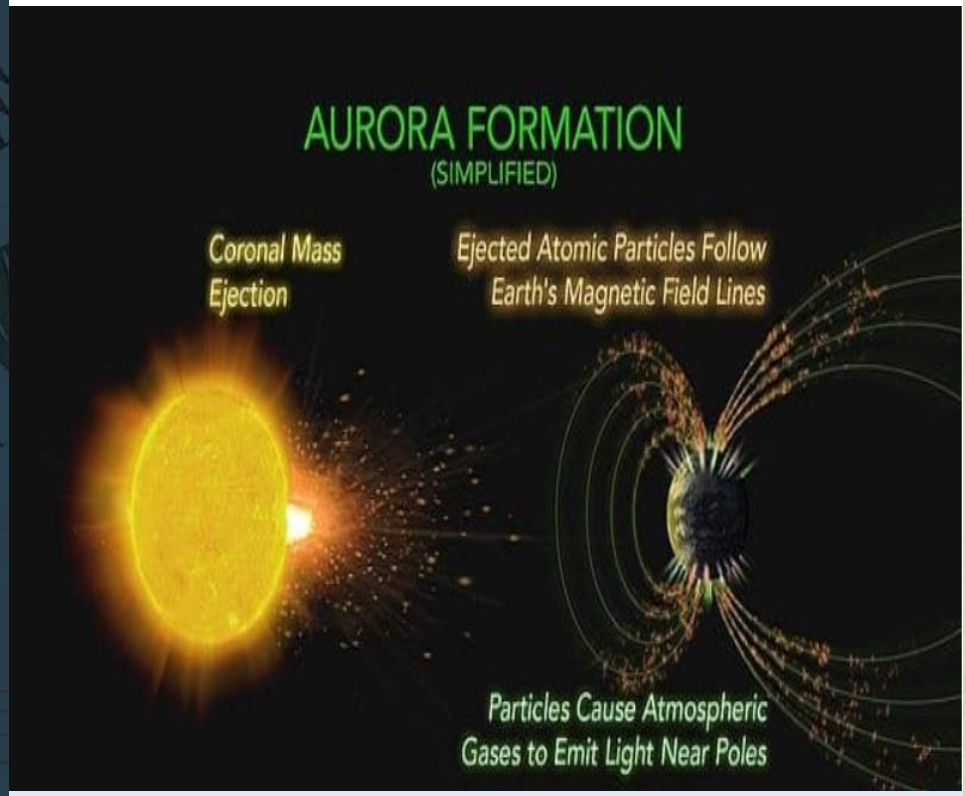
- **Location**: It is a triangle-shaped peninsula situated in northeastern Egypt.
  - It is under the sovereign control of Egypt.
- **Significance:** Serving as a land bridge, it connects Asia and Africa.
- **Area:** 23,500 square miles (61,000 square km).
- **Boundaries:** The Sinai Peninsula lies between the Gulf of Suez and the Suez Canal on the west and the Gulf of Aqaba and the Negev on the east, and it is bounded by the Mediterranean Sea on the north and the Red Sea to the south.
- **History of Sinai Peninsula:**
  - **Colonial Era:** Egypt, encompassing Sinai, became part of the British Empire in the late 19th century.
  - **Independence**: Egypt gained independence from British rule in 1922, yet retained sovereignty over Sinai.
  - During the Six-Day War in June 1967, Israeli forces seized control of the peninsula.
  - **Return to Egypt:** The Sinai Peninsula was returned to Egypt in 1982 as per the terms of the 1979 peace agreement between Egypt and Israel.

LIVEMINT May 12

AURORAS

(Syllabus: GS Paper 1 – Geography)

Northern Lights: Auroras may light up the skies for another night as massive solar storm continues |



Context: A rare celestial event, the auroras or 'Northern Lights', was visible across various parts of the globe for the another consecutive night on May 11, as per an AFP report.

Auroras

- **About:** These are luminous and vivid phenomena that occur in the Earth's atmosphere.
- **Formation**: They result from the interaction between charged solar winds and the Earth's magnetosphere.
- **Chemical Composition**: The distinctive colors of auroras are determined by the specific atoms and molecules in Earth's atmosphere, each emitting its unique set of colors, much like human fingerprints.
- **Cause**: The auroras result from solar flares and coronal mass ejections, with different gases causing various colors in the atmosphere.
- **Nature:** Solar winds consist mainly of protons and electrons ejected from the Sun's atmosphere.
- **Earth's Magnetosphere**: The magnetosphere, surrounding the Earth, shields it from solar winds and is strongest at the poles.
    - At times, solar wind particles penetrate the Earth's magnetic field, reaching the upper atmosphere.
- **Collision Process:** When these particles collide with atoms and molecules in the upper atmosphere, they produce light.
- **Analogous Phenomenon:** The process is akin to the mechanism behind the glow of neon lights through gas collisions.

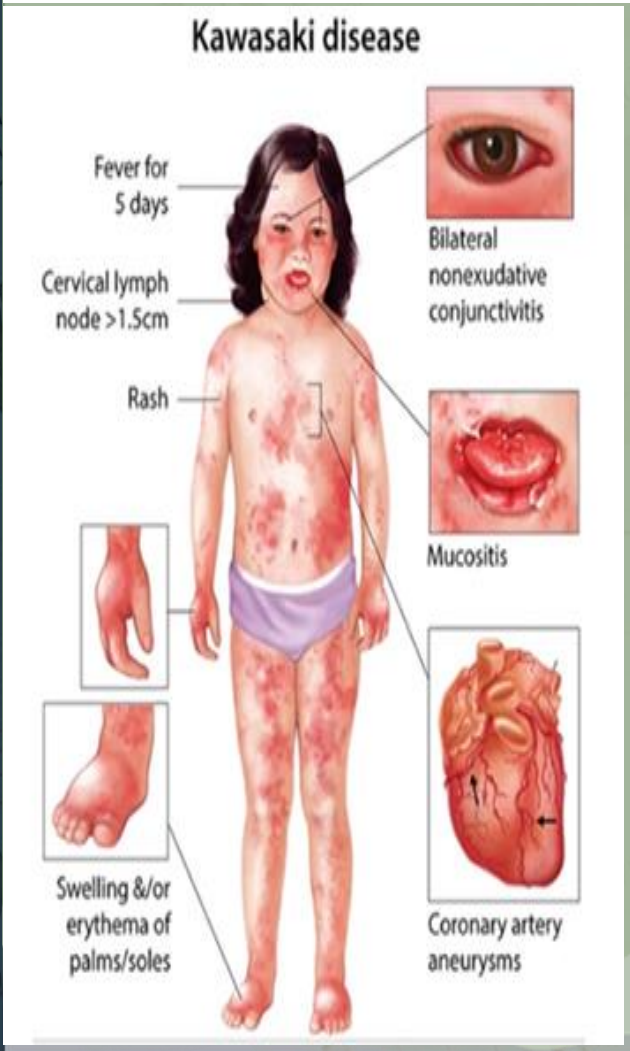
TIMES OF INDIA

May 12

KAWASAKI DISEASE

(Syllabus: GS Paper 3 – Sci and Tech)

Two babies with kawasaki disease successfully treated at CMCH



Context: Recently, two baby girls diagnosed with Kawasaki disease were effectively treated at Coimbatore Medical College and Hospital (CMCH).

Kawasaki Disease

- **About**: It is a pediatric illness characterized by inflammation of blood vessels, primarily affecting young children, and is a significant cause of heart disease in this demographic.
- **Risk factors**:
  - **Age**. Children under 5 years old are at highest risk of Kawasaki disease.
  - **Sex**. Children who are assigned male at birth are slightly more likely to get Kawasaki disease.
  - **Ethnicity**. Children of Asian or Pacific Islander descent have higher rates of Kawasaki disease.
- **Causes**: Its exact **cause remains unidentified,** with potential links to genetics, viruses, bacteria, and environmental factors.
- **Impacts:** The disease can lead to inflammation of coronary arteries and affect various body parts like lymph nodes, skin, and mucous membranes.
- **Symptoms**: Polonged high fever, rash, peeling skin on extremities, swelling, redness, eye inflammation, swollen glands, and distinctive oral manifestations like "strawberry tongue."
- **Treatment:** Intravenous gamma globulin (IVIG), which is an infusion through your child's IV and high-dose aspirin every six hours.

ECONOMIC TIMES May 12

PANAMA
(Syllabus: GS Paper 2 – IR)

Panama's next president says he will shut down one of the world's busiest migration routes



Panama Canal

- **About**: The Panama Canal, a man-made waterway, serves as a vital link connecting the Atlantic and Pacific oceans by traversing the Isthmus of Panama.
- **Strategic Importance**: Recognized as one of the world's two most crucial artificial water passages, the Panama Canal shares this distinction with the Suez Canal, playing a pivotal role in international maritime trade.
- **Dimensions**: Stretching approximately 80 kilometers in length, the canal serves as a remarkable feat of engineering, significantly shortening travel distances for ships.

Context: Panama is on the verge of a dramatic change to its immigration policy that could reverberate from the dense Darien jungle to the U.S. border.

Panama

- **About:** It is a country of Central America situated on the Isthmus of Panama, connecting North and South America.
- **Boundaries**: Bounded to the north by the Caribbean Sea and to the south by the Pacific Ocean.
- **Geographical Features**: It has an elongated S shape, with a Caribbean coastline stretching about 800 miles and a Pacific coast about 1,060 miles long.
- A central spine of mountain ranges divides the country into Atlantic- and Pacific-facing slopes.
- **Mountain Ranges**: The Tabasará Mountains (Cordillera Central) in the west and the Cordillera de San Blas in the east are the two principal ranges.
- These ranges are separated near the center of the country by a saddle of lower land.
- **Capital**: Panama City.

DTE May 12

DEADBOTS

(Syllabus: GS Paper 3– Sci and Tech)

Digitally immortalising departed loved ones comes with ethical concerns: Study calls for cautious design of AI 'deadbots'

Context: A new study urges caution in the development of Artificial Intelligence (AI) chatbots designed to mimic deceased loved ones, known as 'deadbots'.

Deadbots

- **About**: These are AI-enabled digital representations of departed loved ones, utilizing various data sources to simulate their personalities.
- **Also known as**: Griefbots,
- **Microsoft's Patent:** In 2017, Microsoft obtained a patent for a deadbot capable of digitally "resurrecting" the deceased.
- **Challenges**
  - **Psychological Impact**: Limited understanding of the psychological effects of digital immortality on adults and their grieving processes.
  - **Economic and Emotional Issues**: Concerns about profit-driven exploitation of personal data, emotional manipulation, and privacy violations.
  - **Cultural Sensitivity**: Delicate topics of death, grief, and immortality, varying greatly across cultures.
- **Solutions**
  - **Sensitive Procedures**: Developing procedures for the "retirement" of deadbots to respect the grieving process.
  - **Transparency**: Implementing clear disclaimers regarding the risks and capabilities of deadbots.
  - **Access Restrictions:** Restricting access to deadbots to adult users only.
- **Mutual Consent:** Upholding the principle of mutual consent between data donors and recipients in the re-creation project.

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